Sites of Memory or Aids to Multiculturalism? Conflicting Uses of Jewish Heritage Sites

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Abstract

The immediate postwar in Europe was characterised by collective amnesia concerning where Jews had lived prior to the Holocaust. By the 1970s and mid-1980s, there was a revival of interest in residential areas, synagogues and cemeteries connected with a Jewish past, right throughout Europe, including former communist countries in the 1990s. This resulted in much renovation and the attempt to provide new uses for such sites as museums and cultural centres.

My paper focuses on the shift in emphasis from the need to preserve such sites as places of memory to an increasing concern with other issues. Such issues range from tourism promotion to the promotion of multiculturalism. This emphasis on preparing the younger generation for a future in a new multicultural state provides much of the motivation for central and local government to lend support to such initiatives, whether in Sweden, Germany or Italy, for instance.

The paper focuses on the Jewish Museum in Bologna, where I conducted fieldwork between 1999 and 2002. The study illustrates the mix of policy objectives involved, such as heritage preservation, urban regeneration, cultural policy and educational objectives. The theoretical discussion seeks to combine Clifford's notion of the museum as a contact zone (Clifford, 1997) with Foucault's notions on discourse formation (Foucault, 1972). In the process, the analysis of the museum's political economy extends beyond the four walls of the museum into the adjoining space of the ghetto and the city.

Keywords: Jewish Heritage Sites, Ghettos, Places of Memory, Multiculturalism and Educational Objectives, Urban Regeneration, Discourse Theory, Museum As Contact Zone.

The Wider Context

1.1 Immediately after the Second World War, there was a paradoxical attitude towards the Holocaust. A great deal of information was being uncovered concerning the Holocaust, following the liberation of the camps and the subsequent war crimes trials. And yet, a sort of collective amnesia began to sink in, so that in many countries in Western Europe the effort of rebuilding a postwar society often went hand in hand with the obliteration of anything that would remind one of a Jewish presence in the area.

1.2 Such collective amnesia had a spatial dimension and was inscribed in a particular spatial narrative. This spatial narrative involved the partial attempt to obliterate all traces of former Jewish communities in Europe, at least in built-up urban areas.[1]

1.3 It is but a small exaggeration to suggest that every town in Germany now has a Jewish museum or documentation centre or memorial of some sort. And yet, this is a very recent phenomenon, which only really got under way in the 1980s and 1990s.[2] Before that date there was little interest in maintaining, preserving or restoring sites that would remind one of former Jewish residents in the area. Thus, for instance, the "Old Synagogue" in Essen, built in 1913 and badly damaged in November 1938, received scant attention at first. It was bought by the municipality in 1959 and used to house an exhibition on industrial design. In the process, all signs of the building's former use were obliterated, removing the Torah niche on the eastern wall and constructing a low ceiling which hid the cupola. Only after part of the exhibition was destroyed by fire in 1979 did the municipality have a change of heart. The building has since

been restored to its former appearance as a synagogue and now houses a documentation and educational centre. [3]

1.4 Offe (1997) argues that while sites of commemoration were established on concentration camp sites, far removed from everyday activity, former Jewish residential areas in the midst of the urban hubbub were made "invisible" through deliberate acts of urban planning. Thus, Offe cites the example of the state of Hesse, where, between 1945 and 1987, sixty-three synagogues were torn down or extensively "remodelled" for other uses.

1.5 But such attitudes prevailed elsewhere in Europe as well. Thus, in Amsterdam too, the theme of the Holocaust was slow in emerging into the full glare of daylight and remained partly submerged. The former Jewish quarter, in the city centre, had been badly damaged during the war, and was once of the first areas of the city to be demolished after the war to make way for redevelopment. In 1954, the municipality of Amsterdam had purchased the site of the four synagogues in the heart of the former Jewish quarter. Yet, little had been done with the site of the four synagogues for the next twenty years. The synagogues were hastily renovated and made usable, mainly for storage purposes for the municipality and there was no attempt to maintain or restore the original features of these synagogues. Only after the mid-1970s, when the idea of establishing a Jewish museum on the site was approved, did plans take shape to restore some of the original features. The museum opened in 1987, spectacularly combining synagogue architecture with glass and steel construction in order to provide a modern museum complex.

1.6 In Belgium, the barracks in Mechelen, where Belgian Jews had been taken before being put on train transports to Auschwitz, had become a site for remembrance ceremonies already in the 1950s. Yet, it was not till the 1970s that an initiative was taken to establish a museum on the site.

1.7 Even in America there was an initial reluctance to face up to the tragedy of the Holocaust. Immediately after the war, Jewish museums found themselves with collections on their hands as a result of the events of the Holocaust.[4] In 1947, the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction Organisation was established to reallocate Jewish material objects looted by the Nazis and recovered by the allied forces at the end of the war. Some 4000 ritual objects were sent to Israel, and many of these are to be found in the Israel Museum, but other objects were given to American institutions, such as the Yeshiva University Museum in New York, Hebrew Union College, and similar institutions (Seldin, 1991).

1.8 Despite the presence of such collections, Jewish museums in America were slow in focusing on the issue of the Holocaust as such. There were attempts within the Jewish community in the 1960s to establish a Holocaust museum in New York, but it was not till the 1970s that the Mayor of New York took on this project as a major initiative.[5]

1.9 The point I wish to reiterate here is that the period from 1945 till the 1970s marked a period of near collective amnesia concerning the Holocaust and that such collective amnesia also had a spatial dimension. Clearly, such collective amnesia was not absolute; already in the late 1940s and early 1950s monuments were erected commemorating the victims of the Holocaust and by the late 1950s and early 1960s many former concentration camps were sites of commemoration and memorialisation.[6]

1.10 Nevertheless, by contrast to the vigorous attempt to re-inscribe Holocaust memory in the 1980s and 1990s, in spatial and visual terms, it becomes retrospectively apparent that the first few decades of the postwar period were marked by considerable amnesia.

1.11 The 1970s and, in particular the 1980s, brought about a considerable shift in attitudes, namely the more open and widespread discussion concerning the events of the Holocaust. This greater openness to discuss issues related to the Holocaust is by no means confined to the Jewish world. Wiedmer writes: 'France was shaken out of its complacent vision of the past during the student revolts of 1968, and by Marcel Ophuls' film *Le chagrin et la pitié* in 1971. Beginning in the mid-1970s and continuing on into the 1980s, a new generation of activists, foremost among them Serge and Beate Klarsfeld, and young historians, such as Henry Rousso, began to investigate in earnest France's role during *les années noires,* or "the black years", of Vichy France. And it has only been since 1995 that official spokespersons have acknowledged France's role in the implementation of the "Final Solution" (Wiedmer, 1999: 4).

1.12 The year 1988 marked another significant shift, coming as it did fifty years after the events of Kristallnacht in Germany. On the night of the 9th November 1938, hundreds of synagogues and thousands of Jewish shops were smashed and looted, and many Jewish men were beaten up and arrested. In Germany, the fiftieth anniversary of Kristallnacht was marked by ceremonies commemorating the event and by the launching of documentation centres and museums, including the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt.

1.13 Yet other factors also contributed to a revival of interest in the Holocaust in Germany. Wiedmer (1999)

explicitly points to the links between the emergence of a new form of historical consciousness in Germany since the late 1960s and an interest in the personal investigations of parents' wartime activities (*Vaterliteratur*). Such new-found interest was also closely associated with an interest in local histories and the wish to discover what happened during the war in one's home town. Clearly, it is not coincidental that a revival of interest in the topic of the Holocaust is linked to an epistemic shift in favour of validating oral histories and legitimating an interest in local histories and the histories of everyday folk. In the light of such epistemic shifts, it becomes legitimate to hear the voices and testimonies of Holocaust survivors; their voices can now be included in the newly discovered voice and drama of "local history".[7]

1.14 Indeed, Rogoff explicitly links the emergence of *Alltagsgeschichte*, the documentation of the history of everyday life in Germany, with the expansion of the cast of characters to be studied by German historians. Thus, these studies were now to include, 'the histories of peasants and workers, of women, of Slavs, of Jews, of regional people and every form of affiliated otherness' (Rogoff, 1994: 228).

1.15 There was thus a growing enthusiasm to record the oral histories of ordinary people and the histories of all sorts of people, and not just in Germany. Such interest also began to receive academic recognition as well. In 1967 the *Journal of Social History* was founded, followed by *Oral History* in 1972. Two new journals were launched in 1976, *Social History,* at the University of Hull, and *the History Workshop: A Journal of Socialist Historians,* based on the history workshops carried out at Ruskin College, Oxford. Clearly institutional and academic backing for new approaches in social and oral history was beginning to make itself felt (Fleming, Paine and Rhodes, 1993).

1.16 Yet, an interest in oral history and oral traditions was not confined to academia, but was a widespread phenomenon in the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, UNESCO was an enthusiastic supporter of oral history at the time, running training courses on collecting oral traditions in many parts of the world, including the Pacific (Bolton, 1994 and Stanley, 1998). In France, oral history was also an important plank in the development of the Ecomuseum (Poulot, 1994).

1.17 Moreover, by the 1980s, in Western Europe, there was widespread interest in Holocaust issues as a result of a number of changes in the manner European societies were re-examining their own histories. The need to teach about the Holocaust in schools, in addition to the drive towards multiculturalism in many European societies, was an important factor in the way that many Jewish museums developed and responded to pressures coming from the wider society.

1.18 In Britain, the London Museum of Jewish Life mounted its first Holocaust related exhibition in 1988, on the topic of refugees from Nazism. It drew upon oral testimony, family photographs and documents to provide a personal testimony centred round the life of Hilda Schindler, who grew up in Berlin and escaped to England in 1939 (Burman, 1998: 45). In the same year as the exhibition, in 1988, the British government launched the National Curriculum, which specified the syllabus to be covered in British schools across the different subject areas. After much internal debate, the History curriculum was to cover the period leading up to and including the Second World War, including the Holocaust.

Theoretical Context

2.1 I carried out research for my PhD dissertation on four Jewish museums in Italy, in Venice, Florence, Ferrara and Bologna, between 1999 and 2002. Much of my thesis, however, focuses on one museum, the one in Bologna, which is publicly run, with funding from the municipality and the regional authorities, as against the other three museums, which are run by the local Jewish communities. It was in this context, of a museum under the aegis of the statutory authorities, that the notion of the museum as a contact zone seemed most appropriate.

2.2 Clifford (1997) uses the term contact zone to denote the kind of relationship in which museum management and community groups are increasingly finding themselves. Rather than the museum simply collecting objects and representing the "other", Clifford regards museums as being involved in 'an ongoing historical, political, moral relationship - a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull' (Clifford, 1997: 192). In such a perspective, museum management and community relationships are constantly undergoing change and constantly evolving. The history of colonial contact, of appropriation of land and objects, provides the backdrop for such ongoing relationships, but the present relationships between dominant and indigenous or minority groups also shape current practices and relationships.

2.3 Thus, in the case of the Portland Museum described by Clifford, elders and cultural experts from the Tlingit tribe, a group of Northwest Coast Natives, were invited to address the museum staff concerning various artefacts in the museum's collection. Rather than simply providing a description of such objects, the elders and cultural experts spent a great deal of time in story telling and singing songs associated with the objects or with the landscape. Such story telling and singing emphasised the Tlingit's sense of loss,

longing and the need not only for responsible stewardship of the objects in the collection, but also responsible stewardship of the land from which the Tlingit have been expropriated. Hence, as Witcomb notes, 'the tribal elders challenged curatorial approaches to the collection and made it impossible for museum staff to ignore contemporary political struggles over land use' (Witcomb, 2003: 90).

2.4 Clifford (1997) notes the ongoing power struggles between the colonised and the colonisers. Bennett (1998) notes the tension between the agencies of governance and the communities being served by such agencies. Whilst Witcomb (2003) notes that as well as communities and agencies of governance, curators and museum staff also have their own agendas, cultures and perspectives. Moreover, there may be differences of opinion and perspectives within each of these groupings, as well as between them.

2.5 Another way of stating this is that there are a number of stakeholders involved in the setting up of museums and exhibitions, in running them and in serving the communities around them. Each of these stakeholder have their own particular perspectives and agendas which they are seeking to put forward. Hence, the ongoing nature of the struggle that is the backdrop to most museum narratives and to the narrative of how museums come into being and are managed.

2.6 The innovative stance I wish to take here, however, is to place the debate of the museum as a contact zone within a frame of reference which encompasses not only the museum per se, but the wider space in which the museum finds itself. In this case I am referring to the area of the former ghetto, in Bologna, where the museum is located.

2.7 Indeed, the ghetto area is an intrinsic part of the museum, with constant references within the museum to the ghetto in Bologna, and to other ghettos in the region. Likewise, the ghetto area displays various signs indicating the way to the museum, and has received much wider publicity and public recognition as a location within the city centre as a result of the launch of the museum. And yet, this is a relatively new phenomenon.

2.8 By extending the notion of the contact zone to a much wider area, covering the ghetto area as well as the museum, we are able to appreciate the involvement of a much larger group of stakeholders, with a more varied set of interests, each vying for attention. At the same time it is also possible to better appreciate that there are groups who are officially being excluded from ongoing debates concerning policies for the area, but who nevertheless can make their presence felt.

2.9 Another important dimension in my argument relates to Foucault's discussion on discourse formation, in *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) and *Knowledge/Power* (1980). Of concern here is the manner in which those initiating discourse seek to bolster their authority and their right to speak on a particular topic or issue. Thus, those seeking to engage in discursive formations need to establish that they have some authority to speak or to make statements within that particular discursive formation. Institutional settings and affiliation provide an important launching point for generating and legitimating discourse. In addition, Foucault (1972: 50-52) notes that the sought-after authority is partly determined by three key factors. These are the kind of function the particular discourse must carry out in a field of non-discursive practice, the rules and processes of appropriation of discourse and the relationship of such discourse to the symbolic realm of desires.

2.10 It is my contention that in order to establish the sought-after authority within discourse formation and so engage more effectively within the discursive field, protagonists may well seek to enter into alliance with other actors in the field. It is precisely the link between discursive and non-discursive practices that provides the mechanism which enables such alliances to take place, thereby helping to establish authority and legitimacy within any given discursive field. Relations of power are constantly being expressed in any given social relationship or interaction. In this formulation of power relations, power is seen as being productive (Foucault, 1980: 119). In order to exert power more effectively, discourses are constructed and alliances are forged, which in turn create resistance and struggles, leading to the creation of new alliances, new discourses, new struggles, and so forth.

2.11 It is this element of struggle, alliances and negotiations, resistance and further struggle, that I hope to illustrate in my paper in connection with the Jewish museum in Bologna and its immediate environment.

Research Aims and Methods

3.1 My own research focuses on the construction of community and nation as represented in the narrative of four Jewish museums in Italy. The inspiration for my research came from a reading of Clifford's article on four Canadian north-coast museums devoted to Native Canadian culture (Clifford 1997). Two of these museums were set up within mainstream institutions, whilst the other two were established by Native Canadian communities. Yet, they all represented very contrasting perspectives on Native Canadian culture.

3.2 I had attended a Jewish Studies conference in 1998, at which I presented a paper based on my literature review. At the conference I met the curator designate of the Jewish museum in Bologna, due to be launched in 1999. As a result, I began to formulate a research design that would focus on four museums in Italy, the Bologna museum and three other Jewish museums. I chose Florence and Ferrara as they are within easy train journey of Bologna, and Venice is not much further away.

3.3 Another reason for focusing on Italy is the existence of legislation, enacted in 1989, which sets out the terms for joint responsibility and stewardship of Jewish cultural heritage in Italy between the State and the federation of Jewish communities in Italy (the Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane). As a result most of the Jewish museums in Italy benefit from some kind of financial support from local authority funds, usually involving help with the restoration and refurbishment of buildings.

3.4 In the event, however, I was able to gather a great deal more concerning one of the museums and its setting, than for the other three. Over a three-year period, from 1999 to 2002, I visited Bologna six times, for short visits, ranging from one to three weeks. I was able to 'hang out' in various settings within the Jewish community in Bologna. I had previously undertaken an intensive participant observation study in a low-income neighborhood of Nairobi, over a two year period, as part of my MA degree at Makerere University, and so had experience of undertaking ethnographic fieldwork (Clark 1975, 1979). This time fieldwork was different, however.

Figure 1. Launch of the Jewish Museum in Bologna, May 1999, with members of the Bologna Jewish community

3.5 My periods of immersion in the Jewish community in Bologna were relatively brief, though I was able to engage in ethnography nevertheless. I shall briefly outline some of the aspects of my ethnography. The Jewish community in Bologna consists of about 200 members. On the first day of my arrival in Bologna I contacted the Jewish community to find out the times of the evening service, as it was the eve of the festival of Purim (at which the book of Esther is read out in the synagogue and children, as well as some adults wear fancy dress, lending a carnival atmosphere to the proceedings). After the service that evening I spoke to a number of people in the congregation, including an English academic teaching at an Italian university near Bologna and was immediately asked by the rabbi to attend the service the following morning at 7.30am, as I would help to make up the required quorum (*minyan*) of ten men. I did not make it in time for the service the following morning, but went to the community centre and interviewed some of the leading officials of the community, including the rabbi. Two days later I was asked to attend a funeral. This gave me a role in the community, and also allowed me to meet and talk to members of the congregation. My willingness to be part of a group of 'extras', to make up a quorum of ten men, as and when required, gave me an opportunity to simply be there, in the field, and observe.

3.6 My status as a student put me in that category of potential volunteers to be drafted into community service for helping out in the office, stuffing envelopes and the like. This gave me an excuse for 'hanging around' the office and talking to people as they came into the community centre.

3.7 My status as a student also entitled me to dine at reduced rates in the kosher canteen provided by the Jewish community, as long as I committed myself to eating there every lunch-time. This gave me further opportunities for meeting people, talking to people, and observing them, in an unobtrusive manner.

3.8 On subsequent visits to Bologna I continued my stints as volunteer in the community office and gradually was able to join in some social events as well. I attended Friday evening services, followed by a communal meal, led by the rabbi and his family and attended adult education classes led by the rabbi. I was there for the launch of the Jewish Museum in Bologna. I was present for a party welcoming two new converts into the community and I 'hung around' the community centre during the elections for communal representatives to the main organisation representing Italian Jewry, the Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane.

3.9 In addition to such participant observation I was able to conduct more formal interviews with key personnel of the Jewish museum, including the director, the curator and the educational officer, both before the launch of the museum and subsequently. I also interviewed office holders of the Jewish community in Bologna, the Chief Rabbi of Bologna, as well as leading activists within the Jewish community, including those who strongly objected to the museum itself. I also interviewed academics at the university of Bologna who have been actively involved in formulating cultural policy.

3.10 In addition, my study greatly benefited from an exchange of views with another PhD candidate at the time, Jeffrey Feldman, who was just completing his fieldwork on the Jewish community in Bologna (Feldman, 2002). His research entailed an ethno-methodological study of the relationship between community and museum directorate, whilst my own study focused much more on the actual content of the museum and the wider context in which the museum is placed. I therefore feel that our two diverse dissertations neatly complement each other.

The Bologna Ghetto and the Jewish dimension

4.1 The ghetto in Bologna operated as a designated and enforced segregated area of Jewish residence for a very short period of time, from 1556 to 1593, when Jews were expelled from the city.

4.2 It is only in the 1980s, however, that the designation of the ghetto was being revived as a distinct area of the city centre. This has come about partly as a result of the more general "politics of memory" operating within the city.

4.3 Yet, the strength of the "politics of memory" in Bologna, and within the region as a whole, is only one factor that lent support to the establishment of a Jewish museum in Bologna. In Bologna, there is a strong cult of memory, involving the resistance against German occupation and against the fascist regime in Italy. Sites associated with such resistance are memorialised through plaques and the names of those who died are commemorated. Within Bologna itself, such ceremonies reach a climax annually on the 25th April, the day celebrating the liberation of Italy from the Germans, with marches, speeches and the placing of wreaths.

4.4 There is also a Jewish dimension to this cult of memory. In Bologna there are two plaques commemorating Jewish deportees who were rounded up in 1943 and sent to death camps. One plaque is placed on the exterior wall of the synagogue, the other is placed in the ghetto area, on the exterior wall of a former synagogue, now a private residence.[8] The Jewish community had erected both these plaques in 1988, fifty years after the enactment of racial legislation in Italy. It is significant that such plaques were erected in the 1980s, at a time when collective memory concerning Jewish sites was being revived throughout Europe. There had already been a plaque erected by the municipality in one of the main city squares in the 1960s, which refers to all victims of Nazism, without specifically singling out Jews. By the 1980s the Jewish community could erect its own plaques, in keeping with the epistemic shifts already noted previously, enabling the specific histories of minority groups to be validated.

4.5 Yet there is more to the erection of these two plaques in 1988 than just the politics of memory. Indeed, I would argue that the erection of the plaque in the Bologna ghetto was the first step in marking out territory, in marking out the ghetto space as symbolically being a Jewish space. The erection of a plaque in one of the streets of the ghetto was putting a physical marker in the area that would remind the rest of the Bologna residents not only of a Jewish past in the city, but also of a Jewish presence in the present. Even though the ghetto area is no longer a "lived" Jewish space and Jews no longer live in the area, there is a deliberate attempt to "recolonise" the ghetto and claim it as a Jewish space.

4.6 Feldman writes: 'in 1988, as a way of marking the fiftieth anniversary of the ratification of the fascist laws, the Jewish community worked with the city of Bologna, the regional cultural heritage board, and the chamber of commerce on an exhibition tracing the history of the ghetto in the city. This exhibition consisted

of large colour photographs of the ghetto, alternating with panels of text that explained Jewish history in the city. This exhibition resulted in the creation of a logo designed by a member of the community, and the integration of this logo into community self-representation. The logo is a line drawing traced from a photograph of the former sixteenth-century synagogue in the ghetto. This tracing is flanked by stylized Hebrew letters and contained within a six-pointed star. After it closed, the display panels used in the exhibition were mounted on the walls of the synagogue and social hall of the Jewish community centre, where they remain today. That same year, the *comunità* mounted the commemorative plaque in the ghetto' (Feldman, 2002: 183).

4.7 Thus, the ghetto began to assume a new found significance for the Jewish community in Bologna, a means of marking the community's own internal corporate identity as well as a means of asserting the community's presence in city affairs in the present.

4.8 And yet, the ghetto area was also beginning to take on significance for policy makers and town planners for quite other reasons.

Urban Regeneration

5.1 It so happens that the City of Bologna was pursuing an urban regeneration programme that included the ghetto area. For a while the area had been prosperous, but then had seen a steady decline in its fortunes. Much of the housing had been seriously damaged in the war period and some renovation work had already been undertaken in the late 1950s and early 1960s. By the 1990s it was felt that the area needed further intervention, as part of an overall strategy to preserve the character of the historic city centre. Another reason given for the restoration of the ghetto area was the effects of speculative property and land buying of the 1980s, in the areas immediately surrounding the city centre. This led to a period of dramatic socio-economic change, forcing poorer tenants out of the area, while much of the housing stock remained neglected (Vitali, 1993: 6). An agency was set up to oversee the development of the commercial centre of Bologna and a suitable plan for the ghetto was drawn up in 1992; work began in 1995 and completed in 1996.

5.2 While much of the City's effort was focused on the physical fabric of the area, in terms of streets,

pavements, housing quality and lighting, another focus for action concerned employment in the area. Hence, attention was drawn to the need to encourage craft shops and studios to move into the area (Forlay, 1993: 154). As Bianchini (1993) notes, such policies sought to promote employment generation in Bologna through the creation of neighbourhood-based arts facilities. Bianchini, however, also adds that such measures seldom actually managed to generate any sustained improvement in local employment. Instead, such measures were generally more successful in promoting the gentrification of the area, as housing improvements to the area began to attract wealthier newcomers.

5.3 Zukin (1995) describes how the process of gentrification might occur simultaneously with the introduction of cultural services and amenities into an area. Such concerns shade into issues of cultural policy for the city as a whole, and the possible role of a Jewish museum in the ghetto area as a further strand within such a cultural policy.

Cultural Policy

6.1 Bologna is a city with dozens of museums; indeed, a scheme linking up the promotion and marketing of the city's main museums was launched in connection with the city's designation as one of the European Cities of Culture for the year 2000. The development of a Jewish museum in Bologna was felt to further enhance the city's claim to being a "European City of Culture".

6.2 The first major step towards a Jewish museum in Bologna was the formation, in 1991, of the "Jewish Culture Program", comprising initially of representatives from the Regional Institute for Cultural Heritage (Istituto Beni Culturali, the IBC), the City of Bologna, and the Jewish community in Bologna. The aims of the Jewish Culture Program (its official designation) were to co-ordinate the various museological projects concerning Jewish heritage that were already in progress and to set up a Jewish museum in Bologna itself (Bonilauri, 1998). Thus, Soragna, near Parma, already had a Jewish museum, founded in 1986, whilst various members of the Jewish community in Ferrara had been campaigning for a Jewish museum in Ferrara since 1984. There was also talk of a possible Jewish museum in Modena.

6.3 Clearly all these various ventures could benefit from some form of co-ordination; and the IBC was in a position to provide such a co-ordinating role. Indeed, regional legislation enacted in 1990 had entrusted the IBC with a co-ordinating role for all museum services in the region. Moreover, such a move also fitted within a well-established practice within the IBC; its main founding principles, for instance, stressed the need to maintain, wherever possible, all vestiges of material cultural in-situ, but within the context of local interests and needs (Emiliani, 1974). What was now required was the co-ordination of a museum strategy that would enable such Jewish cultural heritage in the region to be maintained and preserved in-situ. And a Jewish museum in Bologna could provide an important focal point for the work of co-ordination.

6.4 Such collaborative venture, moreover, also fitted within the framework of agreement laid out by central government legislation in 1989. Section 1 of article 17 of the Law 101, March 1989, made specific reference to cultural heritage. It specified that the State (at central, regional and local level), the Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane (Union of Italian Jewish Communities) and the individual Jewish communities should collaborate in the stewardship and maintenance of all historic, artistic, architectural, archaeological, archival and cultural heritage of Italian Jewry. However, details of the implementation of such an agreement were to be worked out at the local level, through local level negotiations.

6.5 Thus, in response to the proposal to set up a Jewish museum in Bologna, the City of Bologna agreed to set aside premises for use as a museum. Yet, the IBC rejected most of the suggested sites on the grounds that they were not suitable for the purposes they had in mind. It was the Jewish representative on the steering committee (the Jewish Cultural Program), however, who began to insist that the museum should be sited in the former ghetto area, as a symbolic marker of the Jewish presence in the city in the past and in the present.

6.6 The City administration approved the allocation of museum premises in the ghetto area in 1994.[9] The fact that the museum would be located in the ghetto was making the project that much more viable. More viable because it was beginning to fit into other issues and concerns of the City administration. Hence, the museum project was beginning to build upon an ever-widening coalition of interests and alliances that would help to move the project forward.

6.7 Moreover, the museum building is also actually immediately adjacent to Via Zamboni, which leads directly to the university quarter and is lined by a number of museums, art galleries, churches and buildings of historic interest. Thus, the Via Zamboni has a special position within the cultural infrastructure of the city, as one of the "arteries" of culture for the city, and a Jewish museum nearby would fit into the strategic plan for the area as a cultural quarter.[10]

Educational issues: Heritage versus Multiculturalism

7.1 Educational issues played an important role in obtaining support for the museum project, though, curiously, there is little overt discussion of the matter in relation to the Jewish museum. Nevertheless, there has been quite a lively debate in recent years in Italy concerning the educational function of museums.[11]

7.2 The central government introduced schemes in primary schools in 1979 and in high schools in 1985, focusing on the importance of cultural heritage and the need to preserve the environment. The child should be encouraged to engage in close observation of its immediate surroundings, examining both cultural and natural environment and should be helped to piece together the local history of their own locality (Calidoni, Calore, Lenzi Pagliani, 1995: 7). In this connection, Bonilauri (1995) notes the importance of the regional legislation L.R. 20, of 1990, which pointed out some of the educational functions of local museums.

7.3 Given such a legislative background, it becomes clearer why the Jewish Museum in Bologna should be designed as a didactic institution, rather than being focused on aesthetics.[12] The museum summarises the history of Jewish settlement in the region; it also seeks to signpost where Jewish material culture can be found in the region. Thus, the development of a "didactic" Jewish museum in Bologna fits in quite neatly with the kind of regional initiative advocated by the IBC, seeking to forge closer links between schools, sites of cultural heritage and museums.

7.4 Feldman (2002) suggests that the initiators of the museum within the IBC switched to the model of a didactic museum only after they had failed to obtain a substantial collection of Jewish artefacts, as donations from the Jewish community were not forthcoming at the time. I would argue that a focus on the didactic nature of the museum, on maintaining material culture "in situ" and on establishing a network of museums and heritage sites, all fits within a well established strategy and rationale that had been carefully worked out within the IBC over the years.

7.5 The development of a "didactic" Jewish museum in Bologna fits in quite neatly with the kind of regional initiative advocated by the IBC, seeking to forge closer links between schools, sites of cultural heritage and museums. Moreover, a municipal initiative eventually led to the appointment of an educational officer

attached to the Jewish museum, in 2001, two years after the launch of the museum. Whilst initially primary schools were targeted, Pedretti, the educational officer for the Jewish museum, notes that middle schools and high schools are also now beginning to come, to learn mainly about the Holocaust. Indeed, museum guides often interweave explanations on Jewish religion, culture and practice, especially in connection with life cycle events and the festivals. Moreover, a great deal of emphasis is being placed on thematic issues, such as the issue of tolerance and intolerance, in line with current educational reforms in Italy.[13]

7.6 Thus, it would appear that while the initial educational aims of the museum had been in terms of teaching about local cultural heritage in the region, and the Jewish component in that heritage, the emphasis has increasingly shifted towards issues of cultural difference, tolerance and intolerance. Indeed, Feldman (2002: 167) comments on the new antiracism in Italy, which partly takes the form of contrition at the treatment of Jews under Fascism, leading to a renewed interest in Jewish culture. But also, as Feldman stresses, such a focus on Jewish history and culture is meant to be an object lesson for greater tolerance in society. This is especially so at a time when Italy is increasingly becoming a receiving country for migrants from north and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as for refugees from Albania, former Yugoslavia and other war torn areas. The Italian media and rightwing political movements are constantly launching attacks against such "*extracomunitari*", who are not citizens of the European Union Countries, at least not by origin (Feldman, 2002: 174). As elsewhere in Europe, the issue of multiculturalism and pluralism, of learning to live together despite cultural difference, is being fore-grounded by the educational and political system.

The Museum, the Ghetto and its Discontents

8.1 Within weeks of the launch of the Jewish museum in Bologna, in May 1999, letters were being circulating bitterly criticising the museum narrative, its lack of objectivity and accusing the museum management of perpetuating anti-Semitic stereotypes. Such letters, email communications, and later journal and magazine articles, were primarily sent to the official leadership of the Jewish community in Bologna, as well as to Jewish organisations and representative bodies in Italy and elsewhere. Whilst such criticism was ostensibly directed at the initiators of the museum and the museum directorate, its target audience was the Jewish community itself, both locally, nationally and internationally. What irked the protesters most was the lack of consultation that had taken place within the Jewish community, about the content of the museum, and an implied criticism of those Jewish representatives who had been consulted. In other words, it was as much an attack on the official Jewish leadership, locally in Bologna and in the region, as it was an attack on the museum content.

8.2 While there were four signatories to the initial letter of protest, only one of the signatories was actually a fully-fledged member of the Jewish Bologna community. He was partly an outsider, an Israeli living and working in Bologna for well over twenty years, married to an Italian non-Jewish woman, but his children had converted to Judaism and had celebrated their Bar-Mitzvah within the Jewish community in Bologna. He also had very strong right-wing views and strongly objected to the left-wing city administration that had ruled Bologna since the war, right until the elections in June 1999, and accused the leaders of the Jewish community of likewise forming a left-wing cabal. He was most vociferous in his criticism of the official leadership and of the museum management, at every public meeting, conference, seminar or other event organised by the Jewish community in Bologna. Some members of the community sympathised with his views, although most objected to the way he voiced his opposition. Nevertheless, at the next election for office holders within the Jewish community in Bologna, it was mainly the supporters of the museum project who won out.

8.3 This contrasts very sharply with the events surrounding a controversial exhibition held in Berlin. Von Moltke (1997) discusses the exhibition on Jewish lifeworlds, held in Berlin in 1992. Here there was a deliberate attempt to steer the German public away from previous stereotypical and essentialist representations of Jews

8.4 The exhibition offered a bewildering variety of facets of Jewish life, in antiquity, in the medieval Rhinelands, in eastern Europe, late-19th century Berlin, in Yemen, Morocco, Toledo, Salonika, Amsterdam, America, Palestine and Israel. The exhibition sought to demonstrate that Jewishness is a cultural construct, with no stable definition. Jewishness is 'an ethnicity that continuously renegotiates its space between difference and sameness' (von Moltke, 1997: 96).

8.5 The advantage of the multiple narratives offered by the 1992 Berlin exhibition is that it precluded any single, universal, history of the Jew or any reductive reading of "essential" Jewishness. Yet, the 1992 exhibition was severely criticised by oppositional voices within German Jewry for exoticising Jews on the one hand, and for failing to bring the narrative up to the present, on the other hand. The only accounts of Jews as a living community related only to the United States and to Israel; all other accounts in the exhibition referred exclusively to the past.

8.6 The relegation of much of Jewry to the past is particularly contentious in the European context, and especially so in the German context. The exhibition was warmly supported by the official representative body of German Jewry, and by the official leadership, because it represented Jewish culture in a positive and multifaceted manner. Yet, a very vocal opposition, within the Jewish community, set up an independent forum to voice their concerns that the exhibition remained silent over the genocidal events of the 20th century and failed to mention the period of communal reconstruction after the Second World War. Focusing on the Jewish present in America or in Israel, whilst remaining silent over contemporary events in Germany was perceived as a rejection of the Jewish presence in contemporary Germany.

8.7 In the Berlin case, those objecting to the exhibition also became a very vocal voice, setting up their own forum, challenging the official leadership within the German Jewish community and indeed eventually taking over leadership positions themselves. In Bologna, in the elections for office holders within the Jewish community in the summer of 1999, the pro-museum faction won out, but in subsequent elections the results were much more mixed, and the issue is still as hotly debated today as it was at the launch of the museum in May 1999.

8.8 On the ground, within the ghetto area, amongst the mostly gentile residents, there were also those who voiced their opposition to the regeneration of the ghetto, and to the process of gentrification. This was done less in any overtly discursive manner, but much more in a bodily and material manner, through practices that had a very direct visual impact, though somewhat unclear message, through graffiti. Attempts were made to beautify the area, to lend historic atmosphere and charm by carefully redesigning streets and pavement, to provide cobbled streets, to restrict road traffic in the ghetto to certain times, to severely restrict parking, to provide grants to homeowners to improve the appearance of the buildings. Yet all these attempts seemed to flounder as a result of the constant war being waged against the graffiti artists.

8.9 This makes sense only if we extend the area of analysis beyond the ghetto area itself, to the Via Zamboni, already mentioned earlier, leading to the university area. The Via Zamboni was receiving official attention as a cultural zone, but demands to improve safety and security were also being led by local shopkeepers and businesses. They were demanding better street and pavement lighting at night, under the arcades along which passers-by had to walk. Attempts to provide similar improvements in lighting in the ghetto area failed, due to a much smaller concentration of shops and businesses, who would be expected to shoulder much of the costs. But it was also in the interests of other groups to see to it that those squeezed out of the Via Zamboni area would be left relatively unhindered in the ghetto area. Feldman (2002) mentions the presence of drug pushers in the ghetto area, especially at night, whilst dossers also preferred the arcaded and ill-lit pavements of the ghetto area. Indeed, on the day of the launch of the Jewish museum in Bologna, there was a particularly heavy police presence to ensure the safety of the visiting parliamentary dignitaries from the chamber of deputies. I was told that morning that the police had actually bribed the local dossers in the area to get up early and seek their breakfast and lunch elsewhere in town. The area was cleared of all the local down-and-outs for that day, but no doubt they returned that evening.

8.10 Whilst the appearance of graffiti cannot be directly linked to any of these groups, it is also clear that there was some local opposition to the processes of gentrification, and that this was one way in which such opposition manifested itself.

Conclusion

9.1 This paper has sought to examine a single Jewish museum and place the discussion within a wider context and theoretical debate.

9.2 First of all there is the specific context that has led to the phenomenal growth of Jewish museums over the last 20 years. I have argued that the period immediately after the Second World War, right until the early 1970s, had been one of near collective amnesia concerning the events of the Holocaust. Yet, by the 1970s there was a general interest in widening the scope of historical studies to include the hitherto neglected and invisible histories of minority and indigenous groups, of women, of the working classes, of the very local, the quotidian and the everyday life of ordinary people. It is within this context that there emerged a renewed interest in the lives of Jewish residents in many European cities, and in recording and documenting their lives prior to the events of the Holocaust, as well as what had taken place during the Holocaust.

9.3 Much of my discussion, however, has focused on the need to take a wider theoretical perspective that encompasses not only the four walls of the museum, but seeks to place debates concerning the post-colonial museum within a broader context of conflict and struggle.

9.4 Clifford (1997) was amongst the first to place ongoing negotiations and collaboration between museum management and indigenous groups within a context of struggle framed by a colonial past as well as by ongoing conflict over land rights and rights over the very objects on display in museums. Bennett (1998) and Witcomb (2003) extended the notion of museums as contact zones to include a wider range of situations denoting collaboration with community groups, minority and immigrant groups, as well as indigenous groups.

9.5 My own contribution to the debate is twofold. Firstly, to place the notion of the museum as a contact zone within the wider context of discourse theory. Foucault (1972) emphasised the importance of the institutional base of the various protagonists and stakeholders in lending legitimacy to their claims to be heard, as well as the importance of non-discursive practices and the role of the symbolic realm of desire. Foucault (1980) also emphasised the role of power as a productive force, generating and framing discourse, but also leading to contestation, resistance and struggle, leading to new discourse formations. Secondly, I have placed the notion of the contact zone within a wider geographic/ spatial context, to encompass not only the four walls of the museum, but also the area immediately surrounding the museum, in this case the ghetto area. Such an approach also makes it clear that the wider context for the struggle to be heard within the museum, and which discourse should prevail, relates not only to the immediate vicinity, to the ghetto, but also to the city as a whole, and indeed, to the Italian nation.

Notes

[1] See Clark (1999) for further discussion of collective amnesia in regard to Jewish sites immediately after the war and the subsequent "rediscovery" of memory and rehabilitation of Jewish sites from the mid 1970s onwards.

[2] Even at the performative level, the annual commemoration ceremonies in remembrance of the victims of the Nazi regime are relatively recent in many places. The small town of Hildesheim, for instance, began to hold such ceremonies in 1978 (Neumann 1994).

[3] Information on the Old Synagogue in Essen is taken from a leaflet on the Old Synagogue, published by the organisation in charge of the building, Alte Synagoge Essen, Steeler Strasse 29, 45127, Essen.

[4] Thus, in 1939, the Jewish Museum in Danzig sent its collection of Jewish folk art to the Jewish Museum in New York for temporary safekeeping, where it still now resides (Cohen, 1998).

[5] Later, the Governor of the State of New York also took an interest and, after much negotiation, funding and premises were eventually set aside for the project (Saidel, 1996). The museum has now been established and is known as the Living Memorial to the Holocaust-Jewish Heritage Museum in New York.

[6] See Young (1993, 1994) and Milton and Nowinski (1991).

[7] See Kushner (2001) for a discussion on survivor testimonies and the uses of oral history.

[8] One of the plaques can be found on the exterior wall of the synagogue, in Via Mario Finzi, with the names of 85 deportees. The other plaque is placed on the wall of a house in Via del'Inferno, in the ghetto, where the synagogue used to stand in the 16th century, prior to the expulsion of the Jews in 1593. This plaque makes mention both of the expulsion of 1593 and the deportations in 1943-45.

[9] The premises in Via Valdonica comprise some 500 square metres, refurbished through funding provided by the City authorities and by the Region.

[10] Indeed, when I revisited Bologna in May 2002, banners and posters around town were advertising Via Zamboni as the "Strada delle Arti: spettacoli, concerti, mostre, emozioni" (the street of the arts: spectacles, concerts, exhibitions).

[11] La Didattica Museale (1992); Poldi Allai (1991); Fabbri (1995); Calidoni,Calore,Lenzi and Pagliani (1995).

[12] Indeed, the museum has the bare minimum of objects. Shortly before the launch of the museum, the director, Bonilauri offered the opinion that the fewer the objects in the museum, the better, since objects only present problems of conservation, security and insurance; interview with Bonilauri, 3rd March 1999.

[13] Interview with Katia Pedretti, 30th May 2002.

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